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The men taking part at the *asaŋ lâiwana* had the whole body painted black and wore nothing but the loin cloth. They had to be ceremonially "pure" (*sunu*), a condition which was obtained by abstinence from women, salt, red peppers, and intoxicating liquor. Any one daring to come to the festival in a state of "uncleanness" was supposed to be killed by an awful giant, some sort of evil spirit, which came from some neighboring hill, and walked about the house with a quiver full of arrows. He was well treated and given plenty of *pupui* (maize liquor), for every one was afraid of him.

At the *asaŋ lâiwana* trials of endurance took place in order to train the young men in supporting pain without the slightest groan. They also had the object of settling disputes which had been in suspense for some time. One man leans over and lets his opponent strike his back as hard as he can with the point of the elbow, until the latter is tired of punching. He is not supposed to utter the least groan nor show any other sign of pain. From time to time he merely says *yaŋ al yaŋ*, "I am a man," whereupon his adversary replies *yaŋ bik al yaŋ*, "I am also a man." When the latter is tired of punching the two men change places and he has to submit to the same rough treatment of his back by the other. Anyone giving up the struggle before his opponent is tired of striking is considered a coward; occasionally death has resulted from the effects of these terrible blows.

This method of fighting is unknown to the Miskito. The latter box a little, but it seems to be a point of honor with them to give and take blows in turn, and not to try how often they can strike each other as much as how long they can stand up to it.

PREPARATION OF AN EXPEDITION.—When the Miskito projected an armed expedition against the other Indian tribes or against the Spaniards they consulted one of their principal sukyas in order to hear if they would be successful. If the sukya's prediction, after having consulted the spirits, was unfavorable regarding the issue, the intended expedition was abandoned (M. W.: 307–308).

Both of these tribes were in the habit of painting the body hideously, perhaps with the object of scaring the enemy. Fair fighting was unknown. Attacks were carried out during the night, the enemy being taken by surprise.

INTERTRIBAL WARS.—The Miskito and Sumu were continually at war with each other as far back as the seventeenth century (Dampier: I, 9–10; M. W.: 300, 302, 305). These tribal wars continued throughout the eighteenth century and turned out to the advantage of the Miskito, who, having received European arms through the agency of the buccaneers from Jamaica, were able to conquer several subtribes of the Sumu from whom they collected tribute in the shape of canoes, deer skins, maize, cacao, rubber, etc.

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larger settlements of the country; they ignore the Indian languages, however, and their activities are practically limited to the Ladinos.

On the other hand, the Moravians (*Unitas Fratrum*), who came to the coast in 1849, have succeeded in evangelizing most of the Miskito and some of the Sumu as well. They use both English and Miskito in church and school. The first effort by Protestants to introduce Christianity among these Indians is the one made by English Puritans, who in 1630, under the Earl of Warwick, took possession of the island of Providencia, situated off the Atlantic shore of Nicaragua. They opened up commercial relations with the Miskito of Cabo Gracias a Dios and maintained themselves in the island until 1641, when they were ejected by a Spanish fleet. In those days a number of the Indians traveled to Providencia, where they became familiar with the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments (Sloane, a: I, p. LXXVIII).

SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS: OMENS, CHARMS, AMULETS, TALISMANS, ETC.

BAD OMENS.—Anything occurring out of the ordinary is considered a bad omen (M.: *yulwin;* S.: *diluk*), and some calamity is believed to befall one or more of the persons present.

Should the hunter, for instance, miss the game an unusual number of times on a certain day, he considers this the sign or token that he will soon fall sick and perhaps even die.

If someone should quite involuntarily let the paddle drop in the water, this is accepted in the light of a token of something evil about to happen.

Should the dog act in a peculiar manner and run around barking all about the house, although investigations will show that there is nothing wrong anywhere, this is a bad omen and soon some one of the inmates will die.

The crowing of a hen is also taken for a bad augury. Ladinos and Creoles participate in this superstition, and they immediately catch the fowl in question and wring its neck.

BIRDS OF ILL OMEN.—There are a number of birds which cause disease and even death when being seen, either at any time or under certain circumstances only. They should particularly be avoided by the Indian when he is hunting or working in the bush on a Sunday, but this belief is undoubtedly traceable to Christian influence. The Indians refuse to eat the flesh or the eggs of certain melancholy birds, believing that by so doing they will go wailing through the bush like the lonely bird itself. They also refrain from killing certain birds believed to have a keeper or owner invisible to man, and who would revenge himself.

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Certain owls and the snake hawk (M.: *waka, wakema;* S.: *makowa*) are especially feared, and the mere sight of them is supposed to cause disease or death.

The goat sucker (*Caprimulgus* sp.), a very common bird, is also feared owing to its uncanny nocturnal habits, the swiftness and peculiarity of its flight, and its note, which breaks the silence of the night. In Costa Rica its bones, dried and ground to a fine powder, are used by the Indians as a charm against their enemies. The powdered bone is mixed with tobacco in a cigarette which when smoked causes certain death, according to the popular belief.

A large spotted nightbird (M.: *boa, ukwas;* S.: *ya*), which appears sometimes in the neighborhood of the settlements at daybreak, is likewise feared.

The note of a nightbird, resembling the Mexican cuckoo and known by the onomatopoeic names of *pikwa* (M.) and *tiku* (S.), is supposed to give a flat denial to any assertion made at that moment. When heard immediately after some one has made a remark, it means that the person in question has told a lie, or that he is unable to perform what he intended to do. If the Indians are, for instance, discussing some project, as a journey, festival, hunting expedition, and the like, the cry of this bird will cause them to put it off. When the hunter hears its voice he returns home immediately, knowing that luck will be against him on that day. At the mahogany camp on Rio Camanan (Rio Coco) a young Sumu from Rio Patuca was discussing with some of his countrymen the route to be followed on his journey back home, his period of contract having expired, when suddenly a loud *pikwa* was heard near by. The Indian immediately became alarmed and despondent, and it took some time to calm his fears.

SUPERSTITIONS REGARDING OTHER ANIMALS.—A small ugly species of croaking lizard, called "galley asp" by the Creoles (M.: *akak;* S.: *kakak*), is held to be very venomous. The Indians claim that after having bitten some one it will rush immediately to the nearest water; the person bitten must do the same, and whichever reaches the waterside first will survive (Bell, a: 265).

The sumbadora snake (M.: *matsikas*) is said to be very savage at certain times of the year, when its bite may become fatal. Others claim that, if molested, it will pursue a person, twist round his body, and lash him with its tail; it especially attacks a woman *enciente*.

The boa snake is said to contain a little venom in its fangs, which it discharges in the early morning only; at that time of the day its bite is therefore considered fatal.

A small speckled tortoise (M.: *swanhrik;* S.: *palan-kuwa*) is said to be very thoughtless, and to lose its way frequently, as it may be found occasionally on the hills, far away from the nearest stream.

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825 The Indians do not eat it, believing that by so doing they will become forgetful like the tortoise itself, and become lost in the bush or misplace things, and the like.

825 Strange animals are regarded as evil spirits and their appearance is a bad omen; the Indians do not dare to kill them. Heath, while 787 stopping with his Miskito crew from Kiplapihni at an empty house at Burimak (middle Rio Coco), came across a strange bat, which event he relates as follows: "We saw clinging under the palm roof a small snow-white bat. Some felt sure that it would suck our blood in the night; so it was killed, but turned out to be a perfectly harmless creature with very beautiful fur. But now, as no one present had seen such a white bat before, some declared that its coming was a bad omen; others that it was sent by an evil spirit, or was even more likely itself to be an evil spirit; that the man who killed it would soon die of a pernicious fever, etc. It took some time to calm the fears of the women especially." (Heath, b: 377.)

789 CHARMS, AMULETS, TALISMANS.—Some of the ornaments are un-751 doubtedly supposed to act as charms, amulets, or talismans, as they are worn chiefly by the women and children, who are especially exposed to the malicious influence of evil spirits. In fact the different works of art and modes of decoration, including ornaments, paint, mutilation, scarification, tattoo, etc., seem to have had originally a religious and magical significance rather than a desire to embellish the appearance. Red and black paint is still regarded a prophylactic against disease.

789 Charms are used for managing the opposite sex, as a cure for barrenness by women, in order to have a male child, and for luck in hunting and fishing. Jaguar teeth are carried as talismans for courage, strength, and to stimulate virility and excite venery.

Charms on fruit trees have the object of increasing their yield and keeping birds, animals, and even man from plundering them. In order to render fruit trees more productive the Miskito drive a nail in the side of the stem facing the west. When they make staffs for turtle spears they also prefer utilizing the west side of the stem of the pejivalle palm, believing that part of the trunk to be more durable and resistant.[75]

Celts or stone axes, which are occasionally dug up in the fields, are regarded as "thunderbolts," and were worn in former days as amulets for protection against lightning. They were also supposed to render the bearer brave and enduring. They are considered very efficacious in healing certain diseases, and the sukya makes use of them in practicing his rites of sorcery. On account of these proper-

[75] The Creoles, in making tea from the medicinal bark of certain trees, likewise prefer using the bark on the side facing the sunset.

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ties the Indians will part with stone axes only for a comparatively large sum of money.

Similar superstitions about these stone celts are held by the other populations of this part of Central America. The local names "thunderbolt," "thunderstone" (Creoles), "piedra de raya" (Spanish), *alwani mahbra*, *imyula mahbra* (M.), *alwana suma* (S.), *dama up* (Rama) in themselves point to a belief in their celestial origin. They are supposed to come down from the sky with the lightning and they are held responsible for the damage done at such an occasion. They penetrate the soil to a depth of 7 feet and then slowly work their way upward, reaching the surface again in seven years. It is claimed that sometimes such a thunderbolt may be found in a tree which has been struck by lightning. The surface of these celts is always smooth; often they are highly polished. Their color is always supposed to be identical with that of the soil in which they have been discovered.[78]

DIVINING ROD.—The Sumu of Rio Prinsapolca are said to make use of some sort of a divining rod (M.: *smaya kâikaya;*[77] T., P.: *tiñ amañnin;* U.: *ya bohnaka*), consisting of a smooth rod of either cacao wood or wild cane; it is about 3 feet in length, and a cotton thread is tied around the center. The Sumu appear to use the *tapúa* for the same purpose as the Jicaque of Honduras; with its aid they claim to be able to obtain almost any information regarding the future, their luck in fishing, hunting, love-making, etc.

I have not been able to see any of these rods, nor did I obtain any definite details regarding the manner in which they are used. The following account is taken from Collinson (b: 152): "Another very common and favorite method of unraveling the unknown is an incantation by a sukya. He commences operations by cutting a small wand, peeling it, and tying a short string to its top. He then strokes it repeatedly, muttering in undertone words supposed to form an incantation; after this has been done for some time, one end of the stick is placed in the left elbow, and the right arm is stretched out to the string end. If it exactly reaches this when extended to its full

[78] Some of the Creoles and Ladinos place stone axes in their water tanks and earthen water jars, in order to keep the drinking water pure and clean and at the same time preserve themselves from certain maladies. These celts are also believed to protect the houses from lightning, and for that purpose are suspended from the roof. A "true thunderbolt," it is claimed, may be determined by tying a thread firmly around the middle of the celt, and then attempting to burn the thread. This may be done by holding a match to it, or suspending it over a lighted candle, or even throwing it in the fire. If the celt is genuine the thread will not burn. Of course such an experiment can be made successfully with any smooth stone to which a thread has been tied so firmly that there is no air intervening, thus retarding combustion of the thread until the stone itself is hot enough to burn it.

[77] Lit.: "to have a hunch."

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length the wand will reveal the truth; if not the string must be altered and the process repeated until it is in its right position. Questions relating to the present and future will then be answered by the sukya, correctly as he states, though I must confess that the queries I propounded were never replied to very successfully, but I was an unbeliever, and it is a notorious fact that spirits are put out of their calculations by the incredulous."

CONTROL OF RAIN AND WIND.—Rain and wind can, according to the Indians, be produced or stopped at will by human, animal, or spirit agency. Thus while paddling down Rio Plátano with a Miskito crew, I noticed clouds gathering windward and threatening rain. The captain of the boat, upon noticing them, motioned the rain with the right hand to pass on, with the following words: "Do not come here as we do not want to get wet now! We have no shirt nor trousers with us to change, and if you will wet us we will have to remain in the moist clothes the whole day long and suffer from the cold. Pass on to those indolent and good-for-nothing people on Rio Patuca; they are all at home now lying in their hammocks."

Bell (b: 157) relates a similar experience with the Miskito of Rio Prinsapolca: The Indians, hearing the rain coming by the noise in the distant bush, vainly tried to keep it off by blowing with their mouths and driving the breath away on either side of their faces. They also spoke to the rain, telling it of the uselessness of its coming to wet them, thus: "Pass on, pass on; we are all wet already. You need not come here; pass on to the head of the river. There is gunpowder and tinder lying uncovered on the rocks. A man is burning a plantation there; pass on quickly, lest another shower wet it before you."

Often when the Indians heard a shower coming they pushed their canoe quietly under the thick bush to hide until the rain had passed, and were much annoyed if any one talked or made any noise. The killing of a howling monkey was also believed to bring rain, as that animal belongs to the water spirit, who will be angry at such an act (Bell, b: 157).

While proceeding up Rio Coco from the port Cabo Gracias a Dios to the Miskito settlement of the same name, my two paddlers put up a small sail, and then kept on whistling in order to call the wind to help them in their work. When all their efforts were of no avail they became rather vexed and made some disobliging remarks about the "lazy wind" (*pasa sriñwankira*).

ECLIPSES.—An eclipse of the moon is said by the Sumu to be caused by the jaguar devouring that heavenly body; their name in itself points to this belief (*wdiko nawa kaswe, wdiko nawa kasya;* lit.: "the jaguar is eating the moon"). At a lunar eclipse, no matter at what time of the night it occurs, the Sumu get up immediately in order

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liquid to the people present, but none of them dares to inspect it, not being immune from its effects as are the poison doctors and the foreigners. During the last two decades the fear of buried poison has spread to the Tawira-Miskito and to the Sumu; these Indians believe that the Miskito from Rio Coco are especially dangerous on account of their habit of killing their enemies with the aid of buried poison. Certain charms, as, for instance, the bitter antidote bean (*Fevillea cordifolia*), are occasionally carried to ward off the effects of such witch poison.

DREAMS.—The Indian pays great attention to dreams (M.: *yapri sdûkkan;* T., P.: *amana;* U.: *amiñna*). When he dreams that he has killed plenty of game he is certain to have good luck in the chase on the following morning. If he dreams of an accident he refuses to leave the settlement during the next few days. When he dreams of strangers, he expects a visit in the near future. The sukya, while curing a sick person, invokes friendly spirits in order to obtain from them during the dream information regarding the nature of the illness.

HAUNTED TREES.—The silk-cotton tree (see Religion, etc.) and the various species of figs (*Ficus* sp.), especially the giant chilamate or higuero, are said to be haunted. The Indians and Creoles believe that these fig trees flower only during the night and hold the fig to be the true fruit. Any one daring to go under the tree about midnight will be able to see the blossom and after that will be favored with good luck in anything he may attempt. This belief is shared by the ignorant Ladinos, who claim that the fig trees flower only on Good Friday night and that a blanket spread under them at midnight will be covered with small blossoms on the following morning.

MAGIC AND SORCERY: SUKYA, OKULI, SPIRITIST, OBEAH OR VOODOOISM

SHAMANS IN GENERAL.—Among these credulous people a great influence is exercised by the shamans, of which there were formerly only two categories, the *sukya* and the *okuli*. Of the latter there should be only one at a time, but of the former there is one in almost every larger village. In recent years two other sorts of shamans, the *spiritist* and the *obeah man*, have appeared on the coast.

These shamans play a great rôle in the life of the Indians, for they act as medicine men, doctors (see Hygiene: Diseases and their cure), augurs, conjurers, magicians, wizards, diviners, rain makers, spell-binders, priests, preachers, teachers, guides, advisors, counsellors, depositaries of tribal traditions, and the like. Their opinions were formerly of the greatest weight in tribal assemblies. Still, there is nothing characteristic about them in the way of ornament or dress,

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ordinary mortals. Thanks to these supposed powers, he is feared and respected far and wide. Such a state of affairs is occasionally very injurious to the Indian community as a whole, but in general abuses on the part of the sukya are not common.

Besides curing the sick, the advice of the sukya is sought in many instances. He is consulted in order to find out the whereabouts of a lost or stolen object, and he furnishes remedies to cure ill luck, to influence the heart of a person of the opposite sex, to increase the valor and courage of a man, and the like. He will inform the hunter how to proceed in order to secure plenty of game, for he has generally a good knowledge of the instincts and habits of animals. If he is unsuccessful, he claims that his client has transgressed some prescription.

Some of these shamans have some knowledge of astronomy; others imitate the voice of other persons or of animals and birds, and some appear to be clever ventriloquists. They foretell the death of a sick person, and help artificially by means of poison on the specified day, in order to strengthen their reputation.

The sukya will also be asked to harm an enemy by casting an evil spell over him. The usual method followed by the Miskito sukya is to fire a gun in the direction of the person upon whom he wishes to inflict injury. His Sumu confrère will send disease or death by mistreating or stabbing an object, usually a doll or puppet (M.: *yapti;* S.: *ditalna*), made of white tunu bark, and supposed to represent the intended victim. Some of these sorcerers are also said to transform themselves into a snake or jaguar and then harm their enemy.

There are good and bad sukyas, who are sometimes at feud with each other. In his own village the sukya is generally said to be good, but in the neighboring settlement there is a bad one, whom he has to fight and send away the evil spirit which the latter despatches in order to cause disease and death. The bad sukya will, for instance, send an animal or bird with poison to the neighboring village, but his confrère from the latter settlement sees it coming and sends it back. The animal goes hither and thither, until finally the "stronger" of the two opponents wins.

INITIATION OF THE SUKYA.—The choosing of his career by the sukya is supposed not to be voluntary. A person whom destiny has picked out for this high office is said to come under the influence of some spirits, from whom he is unable to deliver himself. During the night he acts like an insane person; he gets up from bed and talks with invisible beings in a mysterious "spirit" language.

In this state he makes prophecies, and if these come true his friends will urge him to become a sukya. He then prepares himself for his career through fastings, vigils, and other means of achieving exhaustion and the novice will be reduced to a skeleton. During this

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746 Among some tribes, this ceremony is repeated at a later date. The *Sumo*
[34] are said to have practiced circumcision. The couvade is general.
[35] Individual names are derived from some peculiarity or mannerism. Such names were not used to address a person, especially older people.
751 **Puberty.**—Puberty ceremonies consist of tests, the details of which vary from tribe to tribe. *Sumo* boys receive serious military training at puberty.
[34] Menstruating women are considered to be impure and are confined to a corner of the house (*Sumo*) or to a special hut (*Mosquito* and *Paya*). They are cleansed by bathing or, among the *Sumo*, by a steam bath.
763 **Death.**—Death is thought to be due to sorcery or to the machinations of evil spirits. People about to die are abandoned in the bush, or they may even be killed. If a person dies in a village it has to be abandoned.
764 The dead are usually buried in the dwelling, which is abandoned (*Paya*), or, among some tribes, in a special hut. The corpse is placed in a coffin made of a canoe wrapped in bark cloth. Personal belongings, food, and a dog are placed in the grave. Among the *Mosquito*, corpses were sometimes sewed in a mat and placed upright in a grave, facing the east. Slaves, servants, and sometimes a shaman were killed and buried with *Mosquito* chiefs. Early reports of the mummification of chiefs appear to
[532] be exceptional and may refer to other tribes. Clay and gold masks of chiefs are reported from one locality, probably *Sumo*.
765 The dead were mourned in many ways. The relatives cut their hair short, wept, and fasted. A mourning ritual included attempts at suicide, which friends prevented. The women sang songs in praise of the dead. Anniversary ceremonies, held at varying intervals, were intended to appease evil spirits and to aid the soul on its long journey to the hereafter.
[787] Shamans invoke the soul in order to discover who was responsible for
769 the death and to ascertain future needs. About a year after death the *Mosquito* hold an elaborate anniversary ceremony, in which face masks and other paraphernalia are employed. The *Sumo* have similar ceremonies which differ in detail. Formerly, a *Mosquito* woman exhumed the bones of her husband and carried them in a bag for a year, subsequently hanging them in the house. She might not remarry for 2 years.
[34] According to Von Hagen (1943), *Jicaque* death and burial customs are a curious mixture of Christianity and their own beliefs. After some preliminary mourning the body, clothed in the garments in which the person died, is wrapped in cloth or bark cloth and buried in the cemetery. A small wooden cross is put at the foot of the grave, and a pot through which a hole is punched is laid at the head. The cemetery is an enclosure on a hilltop, which is walled off, as are Spanish cemeteries.

WARFARE

721 Most of the information concerning warfare pertains to the *Mosquito*, who were highly organized for this purpose. Undoubtedly much of this

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same way that manioc is planted. Some of the tribes recount a myth of a great flood. The *Jicaque* believe in two benevolent deities and a female god of evil. No offerings are made to the "good" deities, but attempts are made to placate the "evil" one, a female who is responsible for all misfortune and who causes death.

The *Sumo* and *Mosquito* and possibly the *Paya* believe that after death the soul makes its way eastward over a difficult route to a nether world of plenty and happiness. The description of the route traveled and the acts performed by the survivors of the deceased to aid the progress of his soul on this road differ from tribe to tribe. Under certain conditions the soul may remain about the house of the deceased and even occupy his former belongings, including domestic animals. For this reason these things must be destroyed.

The *Sumo*, *Mosquito*, and *Paya* believe that the world is populated with innumerable spirits. These haunt hills, caves, deep pools of water, and other places, and they are responsible for most misfortunes including sickness and death. A large part of the work of shamans is to placate these spirits, to drive them out of sick people, and otherwise to destroy them. Protection from the bad spirits is afforded by amulets and charms.

SHAMANISM

Most *Sumo* and *Mosquito* settlements have a shaman, who may take part in secular affairs but whose chief duty is to cure the sick. Shamans possess some spiritual power, but very little is known of the various rituals through which it is acquired. Sons and sometimes sons-in-law may succeed a shaman. Curing varies in detail according to the individual shaman and the spirits addressed. A shaman goes into a trance in which he contacts the spirits and, in one way or another, drives them out of the afflicted person. Curing rituals also include songs, dances, and the use of painted sticks, carved figures, and other paraphernalia. Some diseases are cured by the imposition of diets, the prohibition of sexual intercourse, and other restrictions. Complicated diseases or village-wide epidemics are isolated and receive special medical and ceremonial treatment. Infections, snake bites, and diseases such as malaria are cured by both shamans and laymen, the latter using infusions of herbs and a large number of native medicines. Steam baths followed by a cold plunge are also employed. Baths in hot springs and partial burial in hot sand are common practices, especially among the *Sumo*. When surgery is necessary a shaman employs knives made of obsidian, flint, bone, and such. Ashes, tobacco, wax, and resin are used as antiseptics.

A shaman may also prophesy the future or determine the route hunters should take in order to find game. By conjuring, a shaman may cause harm to come to people. A shaman may be retained by a person to eliminate an enemy.